

TRANSTOR

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Winter 1902

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LANDSDOWNE GOVERNMENT COLLAPSES

ITALIAN FLEET MUTINIES SACKS TUNIS

London: The new government, headed by Prime Minister Lord Robert Hastings-Lockley, announced today that it hopes for an early cessation of hostilities. The new Prime Minister, who was created Earl of Huntingdon last year after the former Earl and his children were killed in a most unfortunate accident, stated further that at present the government plans only to defeat the imperialistic designs of Russia, and, if necessary, of Russia's staunch ally, Germany. In fact, he continued, England would be quite willing to sign a reasonable treaty of peace, had not Russia committed her quite unwarranted attack upon the British fleet stationed in Norway, and had not Germany signed a treaty with Russia declaring, in effect, that it would attack any power at war with Russia.

His Lordship added that the present arrangements with the government of France will continue in force, pending revisions occasioned by reappraisals of the European situation, at least with respect to the common enemy, Germany.

His Lordship also announced that the nation is being readied to equip new forces, should such a step become necessary, and that the forces in action are being assigned as follows:

The fleet in the North Sea has been ordered to retake Norway from the Russians, with support from the fleet in the Norwegian Sea; the Russian fleet in Sweden will be distracted by an attack from the fleet in the Skagerrak. The army now stationed in Holland is to attack the German area about Kiel, with support from the fleet in the Helgoland Bight.

His Majesty's government remains confident that the war will soon end, with a true and lasting peace, but it must be a peace with honor, with no place for tyranny.

(Toronto Globe, December 17, 1902 -- a secret report smuggled from a certain Bari Goldwasser, an outcast Arzi politician opposed to the government, and datelined Rome)

In official dispatches they call it the dawn of the New Roman Empire; the realists call it the collapse of the Italian kingdom, not that I am one to make value judgements of course. But it is true, as the government publicists are quick to point out, that events of great moment are taking place in this hub of the Latin world, and that the nation is moving quickly to its task. Outside the above choice circle, the pessimists take "task" to mean doom. The optimists, of course, consider it will take a little longer than this before we are destroyed.

Italy is caught in the machinery of European war through no fault of its own, and this has produced interesting reactions in a nation that ranks war just below, in the priority of things, a

...for a six month snowy winter.
The stimulating example was given during the Question Period in Parliament, when the Opposition queried the Government on whether we were at war with Austria. During the heated debate the Foreign Minister became slightly rattled, and after throwing a stillie across the aisle at his tormentor, snapped excitedly: "We've sent declarations of war to Austria, Russia, Turkey, England, France, Germany and Thailand!" His attempted lynching was prevented by alert police dogs, hindered somewhat in their work by the human members of the force.

The King, himself, was reported to be in hysterics at the thought that we would attempt to fight any nations other than Russia and England -- the two with least chance of getting at us. Prime Minister Dato, when hauled out of bed at one of Rome's higher-priced brothels, professed to be caught with his pants down on the subject. As far as he knew, he said rather pleadingly when trying to shove reporters out of the room, Italy was not at war with anybody.

In confirmation of this, contact has been lost, according to reliable sources in the War Ministry, with the I Army Group in Tyrolia. It wasn't supposed to go there in the first place, but a fanatical devotion to skiing appears to have overcome the whole corp. Its attempted raid on Munich was to obtain the much-heralded German beer (as II Army Group in Venice has drank all the wine in that area, and is now engaged in a summer work's project of filling in the canals -- the War Ministry is at odds with the Tourist Bureau).m Now of course it has descended on Piedmont to save its grapes from dirty French feet.

But a more interesting situation has developed concerning the Navy. In chronological order the story goes something like this: in the spring of 1901 it attempted to sail, with great fanfare and waving of flags from thousands of spectators -- to the Aegean Sea as the crow flies! Two ships were sunk, three damaged, 47 observers killed and the main street of Naples blocked for traffic for two weeks when it sailed over half a dozen docks and attempted to proceed through the town; in the fall of 1901 it managed to make it to the Ionian Sea where it promptly mutinied and shot its Admiral for stupidity ("Ya can't take boats without wheels over land!"), raided Capri twice (which raised recruiting to unheard-of levels, though the enthusiasm of the women "volunteers" has been rather doubted, and spent the next six months in the Ionian going around in circles (after the officers were shot for carrying strawberries, or potted palms, or something other than two girls each) flashing signals reliably reported to read "What the hell's the word for right turn?"; in the summer of this year they were unsuccessful in attempting to sell the battleships as scrap metal to the British in Malta (the latter kept them downwind of the island, in the words of one Englishman, "By Jove, What a Stink!"); and at the present moment the Fleet has tunis under seige, styling themselves the Independent United Nation of Neptune, they have claimed a ransom of all the slave girls in the Sultan's harem and a ll the spaghetti they can eat.

Most experts doubt the fleet will ever find its way home to menace Italy, so all is not hopeless, and with luck they can be foisted off to aid the French or Austrians, or perhaps even, with great luck, Thailand.

But the worst police are at the door, led by a fanatic old eccentric named Erling Ma, who thinks I am the milk -- so good bye for now.